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High-level political forum on sustainable development, convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council

Identical letters dated 12 July 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Economic and Social Council

I am writing to you regarding the voluntary national review presented by the Republic of Armenia to the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2018.

In the report, Armenia attempts to mislead the high-level political forum and tries to justify its failure to ensure socioeconomic development by the so-called "blockade".

In this regard, I deem it necessary to state the following.

First and foremost, Armenia's socioeconomic hardship is a result of its expansionist policy towards its neighbours and total disrespect for norms and principles of international law. Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan and the subsequent occupation of a significant part of my country have led to the complete severance of relations between the two. Therefore, it would be nonsense for a country whose territory is under occupation, whose hundreds of thousands of citizens were subjected to atrocity crimes and notorious ethnic cleansing, to engage with the aggressor in any economic relations. Furthermore, in fact, the war unleashed by Armenia against my county left the Nakhchyvan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan totally cut off from the mainland of Azerbaijan.

Successive Armenian Governments have manifested their inability to prevent the socioeconomic conditions of its citizens from constant deterioration. A big number of reports from international and non-governmental organizations testify to that end.

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According to Transparency International, "corruption in Armenia is endemic and widespread, permeating all levels of society. The public administration, particularly the judiciary, the police and the health sector, are especially vulnerable to corruption. This situation is echoed by Armenia's poor performance in most areas assessed by governance indicators".[1]

The International Monetary Fund observes that "corruption and governance remain important impediments to growth".[2]

In addition to this, lower foreign investment, the collapse of remittances, the depreciation of the dram, inflation and a worsening financial performance of the energy sector put pressure on the Armenian economy. External debt has been steadily rising, reaching 56 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017. Nearly one-third of the population is living in poverty.[3] World Bank official statistics reveal that Armenia maintains one of the highest unemployment rates (18.2 per cent) in the world.[4]

The poor economic performance, poverty and unemployment deteriorate the demographic situation in Armenia. Under such circumstances, many young Armenians leave the country to find a job abroad. Some reports suggest that "30,000 people emigrate from Armenia annually"[5]. Furthermore, "dependence on remittances leaves the economy vulnerable to external shocks".[6]

Against this backdrop, however, according to the 2016 statistical data provided by the World Bank,[7] the military expenditures of Armenia constituted 4.1 per cent of the total GDP of the country, which makes Armenia one of the most militarized states in the world. Armenia ranks third in the world in the Global Militarization Index[8] issued by the Bonn International Center for Conversion.

In the context of the voluntary national review, it is worth mentioning that in the outcome document of the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", the Heads of State and Government and high representatives, meeting in New York in September 2015, stated that there could be "no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development". They reaffirmed their commitment to international law and "the need to respect the territorial integrity and political independence of States".[9]

The military occupation of the territory of Azerbaijan does not represent a solution and will never produce an outcome desired by Armenia. The sooner Armenia withdraws its armed forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, the earlier the conflict will be resolved and both countries and their peoples will benefit from the prospects of cooperation and economic development, thus enabling them to implement successfully the Sustainable Development Goals.

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[1] https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/helpdesk/overview-of-corruption-and-anti-corruption-in-armenia.

[2] https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2017/07/19/Republic-of-Armenia-2017-Article-IV-Consultation-and-Fifth-and-Final-Review-Under-the-45107.

[3] https://en.portal.santandertrade.com/analyse-markets/armenia/economic-outline.

[4] http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?view=map.

[5] http://asbarez.com/139232/un-projects-sharp-decrease-in-armenias-population.

[6] https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2017/07/19/Republic-of-Armenia-2017-Article-IV-Consultation-and-Fifth-and-Final-Review-Under-the-45107.

[7] http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?report_name=countryprofile&id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=ARM.

[8] https://gmi.bicc.de/index.php?page=ranking-table%3fyear=2014&sort=rank_asc.

[9] General Assembly resolution 70/1, preamble and para. 38.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 19, and of the Economic and Social Council under agenda items 5 (a) and 6, as well as a document of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

(*Signed*) Yashar **Aliyev**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative